



Dropping in

Heli-skiing affords a freedom very few sports can, where virgin powder and uncharted mountain ranges offer the world's biggest playground for those who have the opportunity

No infrastructure, no problem. While hiking a mountain with skis or a board is by far the cleanest way to enjoy our favourite winter pastime, heli-skiing also leaves very little trace – dropping in at the top, with a pick up at the bottom – it's also far safer to have a support crew watching in the air. Essentially, heli-skiing is available around the globe, but we've picked out six spots perfect for the most isolated of outdoor winter adventures. From the second a heli-skier straps on and drops in, it's on.

CANADA

Officially climate positive, Bella Coola Heli Sports has flown past carbon neutral and become the first heli-skiing company in the world to be climate positive. They have done this by tracking their entire carbon output, initiating policies to reduce carbon emissions and continually purchasing carbon offsets that protect old-growth forests in British Columbia. They are also World Number One Heli-Ski Operator, as voted at the World Ski Awards in 2017, 2018 and 2019. So this is a pretty good

place to start. With 3.25 million acres of terrain, from the highest peak in British Columbia to jaw dropping fjords, Bella Coola straddles the iconic Coast Range Mountains, with incredibly dense powder in the west and lighter powder in the east. Bella Coola Heli Sports' small group format means less wait time and more agile helicopters.

Just a 70-minute flight from Vancouver into Bella Coola or Anahim Lake, the company offers five lodges from the flagship property Tweedsmuir Park Lodge or larger Eagle Lodge, to single-

group heli-skiing at Pantheon Heli Ranch or Mystery Mountain Lodge and unnamed runs at Terra Nostra Guest Ranch. The company is currently offering fully-refundable booking deposits for private groups to semi-privates, and ski safari through to specialty programs for first timers and old hands; from US\$200 a night for early season packages. bellacoolaheliskiing.com

SWITZERLAND

Thirty-eight mountains and a notch over 4,000 metres just a short hop from a bustling Alpine



hub... this is Zermatt, Switzerland. There are five heli-ski drop points around the Zermatt valley which, when combined with those served by Cervinia's heli-ski service just over the Italian border, provide an exciting choice of high-altitude powder skiing options from early February onwards. Zermatt's heli-skiing is generally coordinated by the local mountain guides, either directly or through 'Zermatters'. They work closely with AirZermatt,

the biggest heli-ski operator in Switzerland, which has been running transport and rescue services since 1965.

Flying close to the 4,478-metre Matterhorn, Air Zermatt drops a minimum of four freeriders – plus a guide – at Unterrothorn (3,103-metres), Testa Grigia (3,480-metres), Monte Rosa (4,200-metres), Alphubeljoch (3,782-metres) or Äschhorn (3,562-metres) –

with options to make fresh tracks down to lunch spots, into villages and ski hubs.

With heli-skiing illegal in France, Switzerland is a great alternative from US\$175-225 per person per drop, plus approximately US\$800 for a guide which can be split across a group to ensure maximum safety for everyone. zermatt.ch/en/ski-tours-freeride-heliskiing

JAPAN

Three heli-ski operators run daily drops from Niseko to the 1,107-metre Shiribetsu-Dake volcano in the beautiful town of Kimobetsu, famous for fresh powder lines and steep ridges covered in a beautiful birch forest. The average vertical here is 650 meters per run, which means you will be bagging more than 3,000 meters of vertical with a full-day heli package. ➤

All helicopter packages include professional guiding and safety instructions, along with snow safety equipment including a backpack, avalanche beacon, and probe. Hokkaido Backcountry Club also provides complimentary transport services from local accommodation. From US\$1,500 per person for a six-run day. hokkaidobackcountryclub.com/en/heli-skiing

RUSSIA

Smoking volcanic cones, steaming vents, huge tracts of forest, grizzly bears, stunning coastline and awesome powder skiing – Kamchatka ski touring and epic backcountry options are endless. All the major volcanos within a 200km radius of Petropavlovsk are approachable and skiable, including the incredible 3456-metre Koryaksky. A range of guides and touring companies are available or, if you have the skills, choose

Below: The drop – world class heli-skiing in Alaska

your own adventure. The best time of year is from March to June. Over 6,700km east of Moscow, to reach Kamchatka fly to Petropavlovsk Kamchatsky, 60km north of the main heli-skiing area, Snow Valley. From USD\$1,000 a day. 9vallees.com

INDIA

The highest, biggest and longest heli-skiing on the planet can be found in the Himalayas. Himalaya Heli-Ski is based in Manali in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, with the highest drop zone at 6,000 metres. Since 1990, Manali has been the operations base, offering long days and altitude on re-crystallised powder. The Classic package offers six full days (weather permitting) and 30,000-plus vertical meters of skiing, with a minimum guarantee of 20,000 vertical metres. A maximum of 15 skiers share a helicopter, broken into small groups of 3-4 skiers per guide. After a day of ski touring,



guests will either fly or drive back to the hotel in time for the après ski activities and dinner. From US\$6,000 a week. himalayaheliski.com

ALASKA

When you choose Tordrillo heli-skiing and snowboarding packages, you're choosing an award-winning experience. CNN named Tordrillo a Top World Heli-Ski Destination, and Tordrillo Mountain Lodge was recently named in the Top 10 Best Heli-Ski Adventures by the *Robb Report*. The longest operating heli-skiing lodge in Alaska, Tordrillo Mountain Lodge offers world-class heli-skiing and snowboarding

packages with endless terrain, inspiring steeps, and colossal vertical feet for intermediate powder skiers to absolute experts. Tordrillo Mountain Lodge's highly trained guides will take freeriders to some of the most diverse and exciting helicopter skiing and snowboarding terrain in the world, with over 1.2 million acres of terrain and 600 inches of snow each season. Runs top out at 2,280 meters and end at 600 metres, with panoramic views of Denali and volcanic summits. The winter season runs from mid-February through late April and packages start at \$15,000 per guest. tordrillomountainlodge.com

